

Soviets may put UN veto ahead of SALT

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Moscow

The Kremlin now has to weigh all major foreign policy actions against the risk that they might upset the US Senate and lead to a defeat for SALT II.

Nonetheless, according to sources here, the Kremlin is preparing to upset the Senate (and President Carter) on one issue. And it could repeat the performance on another.

Soviet officials are preparing to veto the use of the United Nations truce force to supervise Israeli withdrawals from the Sinai in accordance with the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty.

This was indicated by UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim here recently and has been confirmed to this newspaper by other informed sources.

Also causing concern is the possibility that the Soviets might actively seek to block overflights by Turkey-based U-2 reconnaissance planes designed to check Soviet compliance with the SALT II provisions.

No Soviet response

Sources say the US has raised the U-2 issue with the Soviets but that as yet there has been no response.

The Turkish Government has said that it would permit U-2 flights from its territory, if essential for verification, provided none of the

signatories objected.

In effect, this gives the Soviets a veto power (and causes Westerners here to comment on the shift away from the US the position reveals on Turkey's part. "A few years ago the Turks would not even have thought of taking the Soviet view into account," says one diplomatic source).

No one expects the Soviets to agree openly to surveillance (which the Kremlin sees as espionage). It is hoped that the Soviets will simply say and do nothing.

Otherwise, if the Senate sees Moscow blocking the flights, it might be tilted more toward refusing to ratify SALT II, sources here say.

National interests come first

The traditional Soviet view is opposed to on-site inspections. It relies on "national means of verification," which consists of satellites and other methods.

As for the Mideast, the readiness of the Soviet veto indicates to observers here that the Soviets will always do what they feel they must in their own national interests — and worry about the consequences later.

The Soviets are said to think they must veto the UN peace force because their Arab allies also are opposed to the Egyptian-Israeli treaty.

But both Mideast and Turkish issues illustrate the Soviet dilemma: they can act — but they cannot forget the impact on the Senate and on the SALT II treaty Moscow badly wants.